15 May 2002

Mr. Peter Stenlund  
Chair  
Arctic Council  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Government of Finland

Dear Mr. Stenlund,

We are writing to urge the Arctic States to sign and/or ratify the LRTAP Heavy Metals and POPs Protocols and the Stockholm POPs Convention. As you know, both agreements single out the Arctic and its Indigenous Peoples.

Nearly two years ago, Ministers of the eight Arctic States issued a political declaration in Barrow, Alaska. Three of the declaration’s articles are of particular importance to the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic:

14. Note with concern how global emissions of persistent organic pollutants have harmful effects on the Arctic environment, and encourage those countries, and in particular Arctic States, which have not yet ratified the UN ECE Protocols on heavy metals and on persistent organic pollutants to take all appropriate steps to become parties to the two protocols;

15. Declare that completion and early ratification of a global convention on persistent organic pollutants is an objective of great importance to all Arctic States, and decide to strengthen efforts to finalize a comprehensive and verifiable convention at the last session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee scheduled for South Africa in December 2000;

16. Call on the Arctic States to accede to, ratify and implement relevant existing agreements designed to protect and restore the Arctic environment, and to identify gaps where new agreements may be needed;

To date, 128 nations have signed the Stockholm POPs Convention. We note that the convention has yet to be signed by the Russian Federation. The number of ratifications is much smaller -- only 7 have ratified it out of the 50 nations needed to bring this important treaty into force. Of the eight Arctic States, only Canada has ratified the convention to date, although a number are in the process of doing so.
The Stockholm POPs Convention was one of many important initiatives growing out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It represents the most ambitious efforts to date by the global community to ultimately eliminate key POPs.

Unlike other chemical treaties that rely on notification requirements or end-of-pipe pollution controls, the new convention calls for outright banning and destruction. The treaty is designed to eliminate or severely restrict production and use of a pernicious group of pesticides and industrial chemicals; ensure environmentally sound management and chemical transformation of POPs waste; and prevent the emergence of new chemicals with POPs-like characteristics. Many Arctic Indigenous Peoples participated in these international negotiations.

The importance of the Stockholm POPs Convention was recognized in the Chair’s Paper for the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (25 March-5 April 2002). Section III (u) of that document urged all states to

Promote the rapid ratification and implementation of international instruments on chemicals, including the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedures for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, as well as related amendments to those instruments; [emphasis added]

We appreciate the support of the Arctic Council to control the spread of POPs and heavy metals, both internationally and domestically. This work helped provide the scientific evidence and rationale for the LRTAP POPs Protocol and the Stockholm POPs Convention, and will be important for the coming international negotiating process on mercury.

We are also encouraged by statements made at the recent G-8 Summit in Canada where the leaders of the world’s largest industrial nations looked ahead to this year’s Johannesburg Summit, and made specific reference to the need to ratify the Stockholm POPs Convention and support its “early entry into force and implementation by member parties.” [emphasis added]

We believe firmly that the World Summit on Sustainable Development later this year in Johannesburg presents an opportunity to press for ratification of the Stockholm Convention and other international environmental accords. To that end, we urge all Arctic States to:

1. **Sign and/or Ratify the LRTAP heavy metals and POPs Protocols.**

2. **Sign and/or ratify the Stockholm POPs Convention prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.**
3. **Prepare an Arctic Council POPs Statement for the Stockholm Convention INC-6 in Geneva, in June 2002, to be delivered by Finland as the Arctic Council Chair.**

4. **Continue to encourage other countries to ratify these LRTAP Protocols and the Stockholm POPs Convention.**

   We recommend that Arctic Council POPs Statement announce the impending ratification of the LRTAP Heavy Metals and POPs Protocols and the Stockholm POPs Convention by the Arctic States. Such a statement would fulfil the spirit of the Barrow Declaration and tangibly demonstrate the effectiveness of the Arctic Council in promoting sustainable development.

   Sincerely yours,

   ________________________________
   Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)    Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON)

   ________________________________
   Gwitch’in Council International (GCI)    Saami Council (SC)

   ________________________________
   Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC)

   cc: Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials